

DaVinci Academy of Science and the Arts 2033 Grant Avenue Ogden, Utah 84401

April 19, 2007





Utah State Office of Education 250 East 500 South P.O. Box 144200 Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200

THE REPORT OF THE VISITING TEAM REVIEWING

DaVinci Academy of Science and the Arts 2033 Grant Avenue Ogden, Utah 84401

April 19, 2007

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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FOREWORD

The major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase student achievement.

In these efforts, the school staff makes a comprehensive evaluation of the school's programs, operations, and results. The school determines how actual practices align to stated objectives and resulting outcomes. It is a three-phased evaluation: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, April 19, 2007, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to increase student achievement.

The entire staff of DaVinci Academy of Science and the Arts is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the Visiting Team. The excellent leadership given by Dean Jessie Kidd is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at DaVinci Academy, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more dramatically increase student achievement at DaVinci Academy.

Patti Harrington, Ed.D. State Superintendent of Public Instruction

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DAVINCI ACADEMY OF SCIENCE AND THE ARTS

MISSION STATEMENT

DaVinci Academy of Science and the Arts will provide a rigorous and diverse, project-oriented curriculum that will result in students who have the critical thinking, self-assurance and creative problem-solving skills needed for the pursuit of higher education or career goals.

DaVinci Academy will provide a safe and supportive environment where diversity and individuality is welcome and a motivation to become high-achieving, socially responsible citizens is encouraged through activities inside and outside the school.

Students, families, and educators work together as a team, with support from the community to prepare DaVinci students for success in today's more global, complex society.

The vision of DaVinci Academy is to inspire individual potential in a safe and supportive environment.

BELIEF STATEMENTS

The DaVinci Academy has not completed their belief statements. They are still in development.

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Ted P. Lovato, USOE Consultant, Visiting Team Chairperson

Dan Barney, South Ogden Junior High School, Weber School District

Mary Carol Greenwood, Syracuse Junior High School, Davis School District

Carl Nielson, Utah County Academy of Sciences, Charter Schools

VISITING TEAM REPORT

DaVINCI ACADEMY OF SCIENCE AND THE ARTS

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

DaVinci Academy of Science and the Arts is a public charter school serving students in grades 9-12. The school was established in June 2003 by a group of community members excited about "the modern reform of American education."

DaVinci Academy is a small school with small class sizes, but realizes that smallness presents its own set of challenges, mostly financial. The school would like to show students the interconnectedness of all academic disciplines, "because science is art." It also values a liberal education over a skills-driven one.

The school is located in downtown Ogden, Utah and, is housed in a remodeled building that previously housed the old American Can Company. The building is bright, and roomy, and seems to meet the needs of all those involved with DaVinci Academy. The staff is competent, proud, and hardworking, and genuinely cares for the students they serve. The students have a genuine pride in the school and feel they are learning in this very encouraging and challenging environment.

a) What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?

The school believes its smallness "has a phenomenal effect on students," but realizes that smallness presents issues such as financial challenges, since students generate monies through a weighted pupil unit (WPU). The school has realized that "the social system of large high schools, based on cliques and popularity, couldn't function in a small environment, and thus they (the students) redefined cool." The students begin to place a higher value on the intellectual contribution of their peers and begin to listen to each other. As a result, the student body is united and respectful of one another.

The school continues to refine its core curriculum and project-based learning (PBL) strategies. Student enrollment has increased in Advanced Placement (AP) and concurrent enrollment courses, and DaVinci Academy has partnered with the Ogden-Weber Applied Technology College (OWATC) teaching staff to increase the elective and career exploration course options for the students.

The DaVinci Academy faculty continues to focus on cross-curricular planning and developing projects within the curriculum while still giving students the opportunity to explore projects within the curriculum, including electives.

What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?

The Visiting Team found that the self-study lacked a defined, clear set of belief statements. The mission statement was clearly articulated, as were the desired results for student learning (DRSLs), but the team feels that a set of belief statements form a strong basis for the establishment of DRSLs and other guiding principles.

Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:

- Continue to strategize and establish a set of overall school belief statements.
- Continue to work on DRSLs so as to follow the overall school's belief statements (as they are developed).
- Continue to seek standards of measurement criteria for the DRSLs.
- Continue to seek ways to better fund the academic program and school-wide electives.

CHAPTER 2: THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS

a) To what extent has the school community engaged in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?

The DaVinci Academy of Science and Arts has done an outstanding job of promoting collaboration among parents, students, and faculty. Upon interviewing parents and students, the feeling was that collaboration was one of the most important principles of the school. A feeling of strong ownership among all stakeholders is evident. Collaboration is, in fact, tied to one of the DSRLs.

b) To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?

The DaVinci Academy had a very extensive self-study with many pleasing visuals. It reflected many of the school's strengths but not all. The school's limitations, as mentioned in the recommendations, were not addressed in the school's self-study.

There were a lot of graphs in the self-study. These gave an excellent profile of the school. They did not, however, talk about the strong teacher component, financial issues of concern, the strong CTE program, or the issue of teacher turnover, which presents other problems with sustainability.

For a new school, the self-study was adequate, professionally done, and visually pleasing. The only concern was the obvious lack of belief statements and measurable DRSLs.

CHAPTER 3: INSTRUCTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

DaVinci Academy of Arts and Sciences school's desired results for student learning (DRSLs) are as follows:

- 1. Collaborating with fellow students, families and educators, working together as a team, will help all students develop the necessary skills to learn from others and work effectively with others for a common goal.
- 2. Communicating effectively will teach students to articulate ideas and appreciate ideas of others.
- 3. Promoting civic responsibility inside and outside the school will result in students acting in ethical, responsible, and civic-minded ways.
- 4. The school will encourage student contemplation of individual ideas and processes of thinking which results in students' use of thinking and problem solving skills.

Shared Vision, Beliefs, Mission, and Goals:

- a) To what extent did the school facilitate a collaborative process to build a shared vision for the school (mission) that defines a compelling purpose and direction for the school?
 - A foundation of the school, as represented in the mission statement, is that learning is a social activity, involving students, families and educators working together as a team with support from the community. DaVinci Academy of Science and the Arts is proud of buy-in from **all** key stakeholders, and it was apparent to the Visiting Team that this pride is justified.
- b) To what extent has the school defined a set of beliefs that reflect the commitment of the administration and staff to support student achievement and success?
 - The Visiting Team found the school had yet to define a set of beliefs reflecting the commitment of the administration and staff to supporting student achievement and

success. This is a work in progress.

c) To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's desired results for student learning (DRSLs)?

The mission of the school was found to be solid and admirable. A strong curriculum will result in students having the critical thinking skills, self-assurance, and creative-problem skills needed for the pursuit of higher education or career goals. Collaboration, communication, citizenship, and contemplation are the foundations of the school's DRSLs, but the Visiting Team was concerned about the lack of an overall set of stated beliefs as the basis for the DRSLs.

Curriculum Development:

a) To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards and the Utah Core Curriculum (with inclusion of the Utah Life Skills)?

It is the opinion of the Visiting Team that the staff works collaboratively to ensure that the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards and the Utah Core Curriculum. The Fitness for Life instructor shared with a team member her semester outline demonstrating the coordination with the Utah Core Curriculum standards and objectives. Project-based learning (PBL) and interdisciplinary collaboration are at the heart of the DaVinci Academy of Science and the Arts. The faculty focus is on cross-curricular planning and development of projects within the curriculum while giving students the opportunity to explore various elective courses.

DaVinci uses the Utah Life Skills document in conjunction with supplemental materials generated by the counselor, assessment director, and teachers.

b) To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's desired results for student learning?

An after-school peer tutoring program is currently running through DaVinci's counseling office, and teachers are required to hold "office hours" before or after school to assist struggling students. There is an advisory period that meets daily and focuses on the Life Skills curriculum, exploring career paths and social and study skills, and tracking the 15 hours of community service DaVinci requires for graduation.

It was obvious to the Visiting Team that there exists a strong bond among the all staff members.

Quality Instructional Design:

a) To what extent does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students?

The Visiting Team was very impressed with the attempt of the school (led by focus groups) to get away from busywork. They created a project-based learning focus group that attempted to ensure the school did more hands-on activities. They even refer to this type of learning as PBL or "projects-based learning." Board members, faculty members, and the PTSO were all involved in seeing that this worked. Students were appreciative of teachers' various instructional approaches and the many and varied learning experiences springing forth from those varied approaches.

b) To what extent does the professional staff employ a variety of instructional strategies to ensure the needs of different learners are met?

The instructional staff at DaVinci does a very good job of addressing different learners. This is made possible, in part, because of the small size of the classes. The size of the classes visited ranged from eight to about eighteen students. There was a high degree of student involvement observed. One student mentioned that she had been in special education programs before coming to DaVinci, but was now on the honor roll and loving school.

Students mentioned they would like a process to be in place for all students to have input into the evaluation of courses.

c) To what extent do the professional staff and leadership provide additional opportunities which support student learning?

The school had a wide variety of learning opportunities as well as opportunities for extracurricular activities. Every one of the ten students interviewed seemed to be involved in a number of extracurricular activities, both at DaVinci and in his or her home or area school. One student was a state champion swimmer representing his boundary or area school. All students felt heavily engaged in both academic and extracurricular activities.

Some of the students were excited about their involvement in the upcoming Energy Quest program, which will be part of the school's annual Art Auction and Benefit Concert.

Quality Assessment Systems:

a) To what extent has the staff developed classroom or school-wide assessments based

on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?

It is the observation of the Visiting Team that DaVinci Academy is currently using the USOE-recommended standardized testing protocols: CRTs, Iowa, and UBSCT. In addition, through the use of the PBL model, assessment becomes more integrated, accurate, and transparent throughout the school's curriculum. The outcomes of project-based learning are thoroughly assessed.

b) To what extent are assessments of student learning developed using methods that reflect the intended purpose and performance standards?

The Visiting Team was impressed with DaVinci's use of the PBL philosophy. DaVinci's focus on PBL emphasizes depth over breadth in learning across the curriculum. The consistency with which DaVinci's students score above the state and national averages on standardized tests is evidence that the school's methods are developing student learning.

Teachers mentioned a need to establish more holistic assessments, including portfolios, which index more subtle elements of projects.

c) To what extent are assessments designed, developed, and used in a fair and equitable manner?

The Visiting Team observed acceptable practices for administration of standardized testing. During the course of classroom visits, the Visiting Team was able to observe authentic assessment occurring in the classroom. Several teachers addressed their practice during conversations with the Visiting Team. The advanced mathematics teachers discussed how teachers were able to sense when the students needed more time working with concepts (such as the blank, quizzical stares that appear upon their students' otherwise rapt faces), prompting teachers to backtrack to a concept they knew the students understood and re-teach the concept until they felt confident that the students now possessed the proper understanding.

Most students feel they understand how they will be assessed in their courses.

Leadership for School Improvement:

a) To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning?

The DaVinci Academy for Science and the Arts promotes quality instruction by offering best practices in education for its students. These include the teacher recruitment process; continual improvements to the physical facility; technological training for teachers; and encouraging teachers to obtain additional training, certifications, and advanced degrees. In addition, it was obvious to the Visiting

Team that teachers felt supported by leaders and students.

b) To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative?

The teachers at DaVinci Academy are in a continual state of collaboration, which is perceived by students and revealed in the data of the school. This bears out the sense of success students feel as a result of the cross-curricular instruction models that exist inside of DaVinci Academy. The school leadership, which has been in a continual state of transition (which is not necessarily understood by all stakeholders) has remained focused on the need for collaboration to assist teachers and support staff members in fulfilling the academic vision of DaVinci Academy.

c) To what extent does the school leadership monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness through a comprehensive assessment system and continuous reflection?

The DaVinci Academy administration and its governing board of education continue to improve the assessment of student learning through data collection and a variety of collaborative efforts between teachers and the administration. One area of concern is the high teacher turnover rate (20 percent) at DaVinci Academy. The rate of turnover could lead to a loss of continuity regarding teacher improvement and student outcomes. The Visiting Team recommends that an adequate and stable financial plan be instituted and followed; this would allow adequate funding of teacher benefits and salaries, which would attract a continuous stream of employees and help retain the school's already competent teachers.

Policies, practices, and procedures (PPP) handbooks, which are considered "living documents," are understood and seem to be a continual source of support for all stakeholders, reflecting the changing needs of DaVinci Academy students and the school as a whole.

d) To what extent does the school leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources of the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment?

The Visiting Team was impressed with DaVinci Academy's learning environment. All duty stations were accommodating, with a welcoming atmosphere and text-rich surroundings. It is evident that the entire staff at DaVinci Academy feels ownership of the setting for learning, and that great care has been taken to create a holistic "school" feel in a facility that was built as a cannery. The library is appropriately equipped, the office area is inviting, and the classrooms have a forward-thinking structure that replicates a collegiate environment. The PPP documents promote a safe and supportive school environment.

e) To what extent does the school leadership make decisions related to the allocation

and use of resources which align with the school goals, the achievement of the DRSLs, and school improvement efforts?

DaVinci Academy's leadership has displayed great resolve in employing a continuous plan to acquire, allocate, and distribute resources that allows the school the opportunity to achieve alignment with all of the goals of the school. It should be noted that, as the school refines its DRSLs to a set of belief statements and focuses on creating a measuring component of each DRSL, DaVinci Academy can be totally aligned with the components of all of the school's goals.

As the PPP program becomes more developed, leadership positions and follow-through with important policies and roles will become more defined.

f) To what extent does the school leadership empower the school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning?

Since DaVinci Academy is a young charter school, not only has it has relied heavily on participation from the school community, but the school community <u>is</u> DaVinci Academy. The board is made up of parents, partners, and patrons. The school community is highly involved in the component of assessing and cultivation of present and long-term needs for the school and those who will attend.

As the school grows, greater community participation may become a challenge, and the PPP program, even though it is still evolving and needs work, may assist the school greatly.

Community Building:

To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?

The community of the DaVinci Academy for Science and the Arts includes a broad network of individuals and groups. It is clearly evident to the Visiting Team that the school community has been and will continue to be appropriately involved in the school's development. It was observed by the Visiting Team that parents, the PTSO, and the board are not there just to see their own children navigate the school experience. In discussing the future of the school, there is a warm sense of "leaving the world better than you found it" at the DaVinci Academy for Science and the Arts.

b) To what extent does the school extend the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning?

The DaVinci Academy extols its relationship with the school community by

partnering with a variety of community entities. This has allowed the school to achieve an early sense of accomplishment regarding its initial startup and ongoing improvements. As the school continues to rely on its existing network of partners and continues to expand that group, it paints an illustration of a promising future for the school, its students, and community partners.

As the DaVinci Academy community grows, there will be a need for more in-depth parent orientation efforts and the review of PPPs.

Culture of Continuous Improvement and Learning:

a) To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs focused on the school's goals for improvement?

The teachers spend a great deal of time collaborating. One member of the school board, who is the chair of the Psychology Department at Weber State University, has also taken a very strong interest in training the teachers to be effective. It was not obvious what other staff development the school supports. With a difficult financial situation, it is evident that school-funded in-service is quite limited. Teachers, however, appear to be concerned about their students and highly motivated regarding the subject(s) they teach, and self-improvement in their subject specialties is occurring.

b) To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?

One of the strengths of the school is the open communication that appears to be taking place. The leadership of the school seems to be very receptive to parent and board suggestions. The staff all appears to be very progressive and open-minded. The climate for needed change or improvement is very good. This is suggested in the handling of the school's tight finances. All stakeholders were involved in fixing this problem. In addition, the school is committed to using data from external evaluations and the self-study to assist in the overall school improvement process.

CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) STANDARDS

The DaVinci Academy for Science and the Arts is in compliance with all NAAS standards for accreditation. Over the years, the school has worked diligently to maintain the accreditation standards as outlined by the NAAS and the Utah State Office of Education. The school's curriculum is aligned with the Utah State Core Curriculum. All professional

educators are properly licensed and endorsed for their particular assignments, in accordance with Utah state requirements. The school is financially viable and ethical in its business practices. The DaVinci Academy has created and maintained a culture of continuous improvement that supports student achievement.

CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS – ACTION PLAN

- a) To what extent is the school-wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up?
 - DaVinci Academy has six goals based on findings of the surveys, profiles, and focus groups, and has come to consensus in establishing a viable school-wide action plan. The six goals are adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up.
- b) To what extent is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, school-wide and system-wide?
 - It appears to the Visiting Team that there is school-wide commitment and strong buy-in from parents/guardians. A great sense of pride is obvious. It is emphasized again, however, that clearly stated belief statements are necessary. All stakeholders should collaborate in the process of establishing belief statements.
- c) How sound does the follow-up process that the school intends to use for monitoring the accomplishments of the schoolwide action plan appear to be?
 - It seems to the Visiting Team that the follow-up process is solid, but the action plan must list specific personnel by name, position, or both, to lead the development and follow-through of each action plan. Continued use of the NSSE format is encouraged.

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends DaVinci Academy of Science and the Arts for the in-depth, informative, professional, and eye-pleasing presentation of the self-study.
- The Visiting Team commends DaVinci Academy of Science and the Arts for the personal and caring relationships that exist between the staff and students. Students

appreciate the collaboration between teachers and students. Students appreciate the collaboration among teachers, which creates opportunities for students to have real-life experiences with projects and assignments.

- The Visiting Team commends DaVinci Academy of Science and the Arts for its efforts to increase communication among all stakeholders. All stakeholders feel a sense of ownership for the holistic goals of the school and are committed to the legacy of the school.
- The Visiting Team commends DaVinci Academy of Science and the Arts for allowing students to participate in a variety of extracurricular activities and abundant academic options.
- The Visiting Team commends the faculty members of DaVinci Academy of Science and the Arts for their obvious love for the students and the subjects they teach
- The Visiting Team commends DaVinci Academy of Science and the Arts for the overall leadership structure that involves the board, PTSO, administration, support staff (secretaries, custodian, paraprofessionals, lunch workers), and student government.
- The Visiting Team commends DaVinci Academy of Science and the Arts for its creation of a workable school plant that is inviting, clean, and comfortable.

Recommendations:

- The Visiting Team recommends to the board of directors of DaVinci Academy that an adequate and stable financial plan be instituted and followed; this would allow adequate funding of teacher benefits and salaries, which would attract a continuous stream of employees and help the school retain its already competent teachers. A twenty percent rate of teacher turnover is of concern to the Visiting Team.
- The Visiting Team recommends to the DaVinci Academy of Science and the Arts that the creation of belief statements be evident prior to the establishment of DRSLs.
- The Visiting Team applauds DaVinci Academy of Science and the Arts for its four established DRSLs; however, the Visiting Team recommends that the DRSLs be revised to follow belief statements and include standards for measurement criteria (DRSLs need to be measurable and specific).
- The Visiting Team recommends to DaVinci Academy of Science and the Arts that the action plan list specific personnel to lead the development and follow-through of each action plan.